



TRAVELLERS FACE £5 CHARGE TO GET THROUGH PASSPORT CONTROL MORE QUICKLY

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Travellers are to be charged to get through passport checks quickly at British airports, with some paying as much as £17.50, the Home Office has confirmed.

The charge is an attempt to cut queues, but unions called it a gimmick and accused the government of failing to properly fund border controls.

Officials said they were working with some airport operators to introduce the scheme but denied reports in the People newspaper that it will be introduced in every UK airport with a charge of at least £5 per person.

At Gatwick airport, passengers face having to pay £17.50 on top of the price of their airline ticket to use a fast lane through passport control on arrival and through security on departure.

The scheme could mean that those who do not pay are forced to wait even longer if staff are diverted to running the premium system and not replaced.

It was reported last month that Edinburgh airport was adopting the system and Gatwick's service was advertised last year.

A spokesman for the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union said: "This is a ridiculous idea that exposes just how understaffed our borders are. What happens if everyone opts to pay £5? We're back to square one."

"Instead of gimmicks like this, the government needs to properly invest in staff to work at ports and airports because the shortages are there for all to see."

Mark Gribbin, chairman of the ISU, which represents borders, immigration and customs workers, said staffing levels were inadequate. "There are simply not enough staff. Our members are working hours on end under oppressive, often hostile conditions," he told members.

"Managers are under severe pressure to contain queues, creating still more pressure for frontline staff. It's only a matter of time before [there is] serious public disorder and, who knows, even mass breach of the border."

At Gatwick, the system provides those who have paid extra with an "exclusive lane through passport control". In order to guarantee fast passage, it is limited to 50 people per hour.

The expansion of the scheme follows a government consultation in 2013, in which the possibility of charging for quick passage through passport control was raised. The government had been running a similar system at some border crossing points, but was only charging travellers what it cost to run.

In the consultation document, the government suggested increasing the price and using the money it raised to "help fund the immigration system, secure the border and invest in improving processes".

The Home Office said its Border Force was "working closely with several airport operators to introduce a fast track passport control service, which will provide passengers with another choice of a secure and convenient route through the UK border. There are currently no plans to roll out the service to all airports in the UK."

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